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Violence and Non-violence today—How Gandhian Principles can help in reducing Violence

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ABSTRACT

There are serious problems of deprivation, poverty, lack of educational and health facilities, marginalization and victimization of millions of people in many parts of the world including India where a vast majority of the population are adversely affected. Although many sections of this population suffer silently, occasionally they rise in protest and commit violence on the state and others individuals.

We discuss the nature of different forms of violence and the principal factors leading to conflict and violence. Examples of these diverse forms of violence as well as the violence usually termed as *Maoist* or *Naxal* violence witnessed in certain tribal or indigenous areas of India, are also considered.

Mahatma Gandhi emphasized truth, non-violence and peace and advocated a people-centred approach to development. He also proposed suitable education and economic development programmes and action that would help in reduction of disparities and poverty, rural uplift, environmental protection and amity between different religions. He led a simple life and was particular about limiting one's wants and needs.

We discuss the relevance of the Gandhian principles of truth, *Satyagraha*, non-violence, proper educational system and religious tolerance and argue that these principles can be applied even in the contemporary situation for reduction of conflict and violence by advancing the welfare of deprived sections of people, protection of the environment and by promoting peace and understanding amongst peoples. These principles have universal validity and have been successfully adopted by several countries and peoples.

1. Introduction

Violence has been with us from the beginnings of life on earth and is likely to continue in the future in one form or another. Violence is found in and used against all forms of life – mankind, animal world or the marine life. Animals and fish kill other animals or fish for food -- sometimes even their own family members. For example some species of fish are known to eat their own eggs and occasionally rats are known to eat their young ones. Female honeybees instinctively kill other females so that only one queen honeybee survives in a honeycomb.

Of course man has hunted animals both for fun and for food. The erstwhile kings, rajahs or other nobility used to go hunting usually for fun and for decorating their palaces with the heads of animals hunted. Not only animals, man has always been hunting birds, although in most countries now, hunting of both birds and animals has been outlawed.

Man's cruelty and violence against fellow man is well known from times immemorial. The nature of violence and its means have of course changed although the broad objectives have not. Whereas earlier man had stones or sticks or bows and arrows as weapons, today there are not only AK 47s and hand grenades, but also rockets, warships and fighter planes for committing wars and aggression against an enemy or for protecting one's country against external aggression.

Wars are an age old curse that have been fought between city states like in early Greece, nation states (as in Europe) and between various rajahs or kings against one another as in India. Epics like the *Iliad* and *Mahabharata* have described not only the wars and battles fought but also give a description of the socio-political conditions of those times and why these wars were fought.

Today wars are being fought not only in traditional ways but there is the constant threat of nuclear war that looms over mankind. Japan has been a victim of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki towards the end of Second World War.

Another feature of conflict and warfare today is through the means of terrorism. This modern form of attrition has spread its tentacles all over the globe whether it is Chechnya, Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan or India. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish terrorism from open wars. For example, Pakistan has waged three full scale wars against India on the issue of Kashmir. More recently elements in Pakistan have indulged in cross border terrorism and the Mumbai attack on 26 November 2009, as a means of hurting India. When confronted with their involvement, Pakistan has defended itself by asserting that it is non-state actors who are responsible for terrorism. Whether it is state or non-state actors who are responsible, it appears that there are elements in the Pakistani polity that have changed their strategy but not their state of antipathy to India. Of course, Pakistan itself is suffering from the various incidents of terrorist activities that show no sign of reducing.

We also have violence committed against the weaker sections of the society – the poor, the women or the indigenous peoples (***adivasis*** of India). According to a report submitted by Professor S Tendulkar (1) in 2009, the poor number about 37.2 % of the Indian population or approximately 400 million. Children or those living in slums are particularly vulnerable. Reports

suggest that more than 50,000 children die of malnutrition every year in Indian urban slums alone.

As a result of state polices and programmes, we also see the Indian farmers in great distress. Their condition is aggravated due to vagaries of nature and other factors. Again, the figures of farmers committing suicide are really shocking. It has been estimated that more than two hundred thousand farmers committed suicide all over India since 1997 due to reasons that are well known – crop failure and resultant indebtedness.

Economic developmental activities like mining, setting up of industrial plants, building big dams or roads in remote areas are leading to degradation of the environment – hills, forests, rivers, soil or air. This often results in disease or death of different forms of life. The over exploitation of nature with its attendant adverse consequences is usually termed as violence against the environment.

There is another type of violence that is visible today – pelting of stones, blowing up of police stations or schools or trucks or trains by some sections of the population. This is generally done to highlight certain core problems of or injustice felt by these sections against the state or its policies.

Another cause of violence is the destruction and killings resulting from natural disasters. The earthquake and the tsunami that hit in tandem the north eastern part of Japan in March of 2011, was the latest example of destruction inflicted on people due to natural disasters. The disaster was made worse by the fact that hazardous radiation was leaking from atomic reactors that were damaged by this catastrophe.

These are some of the forms of violence that we discuss in this chapter. We try to analyse the theory and practice of violence, its nature and its diverse forms. We also outline possible motivation, impulses and causes of violence. Of course not all types of violence lead to killing. But even if it does not, violence can often result in a deep adverse psychological or social impairment that can be quite dangerous or traumatic.

The American civil rights leader and scholar Howard Thurman (2) wrote in his 1963 essay *(Disciplines of the Spirit)* that non-violence (NV) and non-killing mean essentially the same thing in the sense that they both oppose the logic of hate which is to kill. However, non-killing is more specific that NV. The word *ahimsa* or non-violence was popularized by Gandhi and is considered more general than non-killing which has a direct specific connotation meaning non-killing of human life. According to J E Pim (3) (Introduction – A new non-killing paradigm emerges), “In spite of its specific focus non-killing tackles broader issues that account for structural killing and non-killing. In relation to psychological aggression, physical assault and torture intended to terrorize by manifest or latent threat to life, non-killing implies the removal of their psychological causes (P16 first para).”

In Sections 8 and 9, we briefly recapitulate Gandhi’s concept and practice of peace and non-violence and his emphasis on right type of education and suitable developmental techniques. We

argue that if these practices are put into practice, even to a limited extent, the occurrence of conflict, violence and resultant killings is likely to decrease.

2. State, community, individuals and violence

By a State we generally mean a set of institutions like the legislature (Parliament), executive (government – central or regional or local), judiciary, the election commission (where it exists independently), the armed forces, police, etc. There are of course critical differences between a parliamentary from a Presidential form of government. In the former, a Prime Minister is at the head of the government -- in the latter it is a President who is the executive head of government. Examples of the former are UK and India whereas USA and France would be prime examples of the presidential form of government.

The State provides its citizens with the basic conditions of survival and growth. It also protects its citizens against external or internal aggression and violence. It is also expected to ensure a rule of law and proper governance by its laws, policies and programmes and where necessary by legitimate use of force/violence against its own citizens as well as home grown terrorists or communities that are prone to violence.

A community generally refers to people or individuals organized as a social grouping or a group of individuals with specific characteristics. For example we may have a community or groupings of physicists or tribals or Buddhists etc. In the context that is being used in this article, a community is distinct from the state.

An individual or a group of individuals means a person or a group of persons or people who act in an individual manner with limited objectives and resources. They are not acting in unison as a community does.

In terms of the parameters of state, community and individual(s), violence may be divided into:

1. *Violence by the state on individuals or a group of individuals (community)*
2. *Violence by an individual or community against the state*
3. *Violence by an individual against another individual; e.g. looting, stealing kidnapping, raping, extorting money or demanding ransom etc.*
4. *Violence committed by a community against another community, as often happens in the case of religious communities*
5. *Violence against the environment resulting in serious adverse consequences*
6. *Violence and destruction resulting from natural disasters*.

3. Nature of Violence

Violence manifests itself in several different forms which may broadly be categorized as:

- *Direct (or active) violence,*
- *Institutional violence*
- *Indirect or passive violence*

Direct or active violence can take several different forms and dimensions:

- Shooting or killing people with conventional weapons
- Aerial or nuclear bombings of specified targets
- Whipping, cutting off hands, stoning adulterers (prevalent in some orthodox Muslim countries)
- Slapping or caning errant school children
- Bombing religious institutions like mosques, churches, temples and killing people of different religious beliefs
- Uprooting, destroying or burning buildings, railway tracks, roads, hospitals, schools, buses or police stations
- Ambushing police or army personnel in one's own country
- Pelting stones or burning buses or schools by some sections of the society
- Foeticide or infanticide especially of female infants

3.1 Institutional or Structural Violence

This is usually used to describe forms of institutionalized social injustice, and the violence that results because of critical social roles, values, norms, and patterns. This goes beyond the commonsense understanding of violence caused by bodily force.

Alternatively, institutional violence also refers to the violence or harm that can be caused by the State as a result of its laws, policies or programmes. For example, farmers' suicides are caused as a result of several factors -- the various policies of the government, indebtedness, floods or drought etc. Where the first factor is the cause of a farmer's distress and suicide, we would say that it is institutional violence that is responsible for it.

Religious institutions are also committing various acts of violence including killings people of other faiths or denominations. Earlier there were religious wars between various sects of Christianity. Today Shias and Sunnis are carrying on similar acts of violence against each other in several parts of the world. In Pakistan one reads about acts of shooting, suicide bombing or burning regularly by elements that are hostile to the beliefs of the victims. On March 2, 2011, Pakistan's federal minister of minority affairs Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, was shot to death for suggesting that the country's 'blasphemy laws' be modified. Earlier in January the governor of Punjab (Pakistan), Salmaan Taseer was assassinated by his own bodyguard for the same reason.

I list below some common forms of structural or institutional violence inflicted on people:

- Arresting, punishing and jailing a person who may be subsequently found to be totally innocent of the charge leveled against him
- Gender violence suffered by women in many parts of the world
- Abuse and violence suffered by sex workers
- Labourers falling ill because of toxic environmental factors in mines, factories and any place of work

- Poverty and destitution suffered by large sections of the people due to various factors--lack of adequate food, shelter, education or lack of clean drinking water and proper hygiene. According to Gandhi poverty is the source of violence suffered by these people.
- Destruction of temples, churches and mosques and resultant killings by suicide bombers, or by other means
- Persecution and discrimination suffered by religious minorities in many parts of the world. Imposing dominant religious cultural beliefs or traditions over religious minorities—e.g. imposing jazia tax or other forms of repression on minorities in Pakistan or Afghanistan among several countries.

3.2 Indirect or passive violence

Under this category, there does not appear to be any overt or visible form of violence caused by the State or individual or community but violence is suffered by people due to indirect causes. Some of these are:

- A child becoming an orphan as a result of death of the child's parents;
- Widows who are thrown out of their homes and forced to live on the *ghats* of *Varansi* or in *Vrindavan* in the state of Uttar Pradesh and forced to beg for their survival.
- A person who has seen his loved one – husband, child, brother or sister being killed or drowning or being raped -- the violence and suffering experienced by the person at the memory of this trauma.

Passive violence is like passive smoking. Even when a person does not smoke, the proximity to a smoker makes the person inhale toxic fumes. Similarly when we see violence all around us, we also resort to violence either in a direct or indirect manner.

3.3 Passive Violence

What is passive violence? According to Gandhi as highlighted by his grandson Arun, passive violence is that which disrespects other people's (and our own) lives, such as name-calling, teasing, humiliating and criticizing, even if it is just in our heart or thoughts. These small and often inconspicuous acts that we commit are actually a form of violence. Similarly a child, who witnesses violence in his own family or neighbourhood, also tends to acquire brutish or violent traits. What causes passive violence?

On a deeper level, many people, including great leaders of our time, have said that a lack of self-identity can lead to passive violence. In other words, without a strong sense of confidence in knowing who we are, we can end up feeling insecure and even develop an insecurity complex. As philosopher Daisaku Ikeda (4) puts it, "When you succumb to a complex, you are likely to see everything about yourself in a negative light. When something doesn't work out for you, you tend to blame it on those things which make you feel inferior: 'It's because I'm weak' and so forth." Lacking a solid sense of who we are makes us feel insecure, and this can cause us to compare ourselves to others and even criticize or judge others because they are different from us. Gandhi was referring to these traits when he stated that passive violence leads to physical violence.

How do we counteract violence, especially passive violence? Psychologists believe that first of all, it is important to stop comparing ourselves to others, since it is neither good for us, nor for others. Second, we can embrace and accept ourselves for who we are today - not for the person we want to be in 5 years, or for the person we're glad we're not, but for the person that we are today. When we accept ourselves for who we are, we free ourselves from the shackles of comparison and allow ourselves to grow and develop from where we are now. Next, we can do our best to confront whatever task or challenge with which we are faced. By doing our best, we develop a form of confidence that enables us to feel good about who we are as individuals and that helps us to see our shared identity as human beings. When we start to awaken to our deeper identity, we create a revolution in consciousness and begin to see our similarities rather than focus on our differences.

4. Application of violence to highlight issues

Violence in any form is bad and should be avoided. It leads to death, destruction, hatred, envy and brutality. However in certain conditions violence can be justified. Gandhi had said that if you are being attacked by an enemy force it is your duty to defend your country against external aggression or violence. According to this view, occasionally certain situations arise when ends justify means; in other words violence could be justified if it ultimately leads to peace and harmony. President Bush used this justification to invade Iraq although subsequent events have shown how wrong his policies were.

Violence has other uses also in the contemporary world. Before referring to human violence, let us briefly consider the violence observed in the animal world as referred to in the Introduction to this essay. There is violence but it is used more to control the number of animals or fish of a particular species so that the problem of overpopulation does not occur.

There is also another application of human violence -- for non-peaceful demonstrations in order to put forward a community's demands whether legitimate or otherwise. We have seen large-scale violence in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the form of terrorism and pelting of stones etc. There are also many incidents of violence in the tribal or so-called *Maoist* or *Naxal* areas like kidnapping or killing policemen, uprooting railway tracks, burning buses or police stations etc (elaborated in section 6). Without going into the merits of these forms of violence – whether they are justified, whether non-violent means could be adopted, one obvious result of this violence is that the demands of the people committing violence come to centre stage. They acquire a certain degree of urgency that would otherwise not be possible. As a result, the government begins to take notice of these events and initiates some sort of action like holding talks, initiating certain steps to remedy the situation and diffuse or reduce violence.

Thus we see that where normal means of protest are unsuccessful, violence sometimes helps these demands becoming clearly prominent and visible and remedial action being taken on a priority basis.

Earlier, after India became an independent nation, there was a demand to create a separate *Telegu* speaking state of *Andhra Pradesh* from the erstwhile state of Madras presidency. The government of Nehru did not favourably consider this demand. As a result *Potti Sri Ramulu* one

of the important leaders of the separate Andhra movement, went on an indefinite fast from October 19, 1952 demanding the creation of separate Andhra state for the Telugu speaking people. He died after 58 days of fasting on December 15. Violence spread all over the region at the news of his death. Ultimately Jawaharlal Nehru conceded the demand and a separate Andhra Pradesh was inaugurated on October 1, 1953.

Today we see a similar upsurge of activities – going on fasts, holding rallies and demonstrations for the creation of a separate state of *Telengana* out of the present Andhra Pradesh.

5. Violence against the environment

Plant, marine, animal and human life has existed on earth for thousands of years in harmony with nature. The natural resources – water bodies, trees, forests, soil, air etc have been used for centuries for survival of life but within limits so that nature had the opportunity of replenishing and cleansing itself. However with the advent of modern technology and the developmental paradigm that is being currently followed, the natural resources and nature itself have been exploited beyond reasonable limits as a result of which the environment as well as life on earth has come under increasing strain.

Hills, mountains, forests, rivers, sea coasts have been subjected to the developmental activities for decades. Roads, railway tracks, construction of big dams, setting up of mining or other industrial projects have resulted in upsetting and partially destroying the delicate balance that prevails in nature. The outcome has become too glaring to ignore. Hills are being denuded of trees, deforestation is taking place on a large scale, many rivers have become polluted, marine life is endangered, our air especially near big urban centres has also become polluted, and several glaciers are melting leading to flooding and rise in ocean levels and so on.

Several efforts have been made to meet this environmental challenge at international, national and local levels.

An organization called **avaaz.org** has sent emails to thousands of its supporters informing that the '*Grand Canyon***,** one of America's greatest treasures, is threatened by a huge wave of Uranium mining.' It also points out that

> 'A hard-won moratorium on mining has protected the Canyon, but the ban is now set to expire. If the federal government doesn't renew it,, a "Uranium Rush" of mining would permanently scar the face of this unique and priceless land, devastate local communities, and endanger water supplies for millions who live nearby.'

In India, the benign looking but determined *Sunderlal Bahuguna* adopted the unique practice of *chipko* or embracing trees to prevent their being felled in the northern hills of India; *Rajendra Singh* has succeeded in reversing the problems of failing agriculture and migration of farmers from several Rajasthan villages as a result of falling water levels; several non government

organizations and civil society have become active in cleansing of the rivers especially Ganges and the like.

Despite these efforts, there is an unrelenting pressure on nature or what some people have called *violence against the environment*. As a result we witness landslides, flooding at some places and lack of rainfall at others, failing agriculture, destruction of animal and marine life, stunted growth in children being born in polluted areas, etc.

The situation as far as the tribal population is concerned is particularly alarming since they are heavily dependent on the neighbouring forests, hills, lands and water bodies for their survival. This has been poignantly summed up in the book *Out of this Earth* by Felix Padel and Samarendra Das (5) in the following words:

> *Out of earth we are made and to earth we shall return. But how well do we know our earth? How well do we understand how it feeds us? Or what are we doing to it through mining? Our modern lifestyle depends on extracting and processing huge quantities of minerals and oil. But what is the real cost we are making our earth pay?*
>
> *Adivasis are India's indigenous or tribal people. They developed a lifestyle and social structure close to the earth many centuries ago. Most still live by cultivating the soil and gathering food from the forest. They experience the costs of mining most acutely, and understand its consequences better than most..*

Tribal people having been living in harmony with nature for centuries. They have been using the resources available in forests or in water bodies intelligently and with restraint so that the environment does not degrade. But now with the dominance of modern economic development paradigm and with corporate bodies entering these areas, their very survival is at stake.

Not only are they deprived of their homes and lands, nearby forests, the sources of water are also being taken over by commercial interests. As reported in a recent article by Abhilash Babu (6), water has become an economic commodity resulting in it going out of reach of millions of poor people in several developing countries. It is estimated that this has led to millions of children falling ill from water borne diseases and about two million dying every year in India alone.

On the occasion of World Water day, Radhika Raheja has emphasized in her article in the Hindustan Times (22 March 2011) the human right of access to clean and to equal distribution of water and the need to conserve it. In her words "water is a prime natural resource, a basic human need and precious national asset'.

An article by the undersigned (Ravi P Bhatia, *Gandhi Marg*, Vol 32, Oct-Dec 2010 pp 363-378) (7) underlines the close relationship of the tribal population with the neighbouring hills and forests. In this regard, it is worth while repeating the evocative description of this relationship by the well known writer Arundhati Roy in the Forward of the above cited book *Out of this Earth*:

> *The low flat-topped mountains of Orissa contain some of the largest deposits of the best quality bauxite in the world….But these bauxite mountains have been home to the Dongria Kond tribe long before there was a country called India or a state called Orissa. The hills watched over the Kond. The Kond watched over the hills and worshipped them as living deities. Now these hills have been sold for the bauxite they contain. For the Kond it's as though God has been sold…*

This book also describes how the mining for the metal aluminium has inexorably destroyed the lands and the hills in the Indian state of Orissa.

Professor Virginius Xaxa of the University of Delhi, a tribal himself has, in a recent book (Xaxa 2008) (8) written about the difficulties being faced by tribal people today:

> *The harmony between natural and social worlds that the tribes had maintained for centuries was ruptured first during the colonial period and then in the post-colonial Forest Policy of 1952. Tribes were deprived of their traditional livelihood, culture and rituals without their consent."*

This type of development is leading to the uprooting of the *Adivasis* from their traditional lands. It is also resulting in destitution, despair and violence by some sections of these tribals with the support of some political elements.

6. Maoist/Naxal violence

We know that there is widespread poverty and discrimination in the country. According to the Tendulkar report ((1), op cit.), the number of people below the poverty line (BPL) is 37.2 % or a staggering 400 million. These people are not only poor and hungry, they suffer from lack of education, health care and employment facilities and are victims of social, political and economic discrimination.

The problems of the people in the tribal belt in India (Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, parts of Bihar and West Bengal) are particularly bad. These people are not only victims of poverty and hunger, they are being uprooted from the forest lands that have been their traditional homes for centuries, due to gradual encroachment by the State agencies or industrial houses for mining and building dams etc.

While the majority of Adivasis remain peaceful in the face of their adversity, some elements who may also be supported by local politicians, do resort to activities like stoning, arson, kidnapping and killing of police or other official personnel to highlight their deplorable conditions. The violence committed by these sections of the *Adivasis* who believe in the cult of violence, is generally referred to as *Maoist* or *Naxal* violence. The Maoists (named after the Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung) though small in number, believe in overthrowing the State through violent means.

It has been observed that people largely remain peaceful if their minimum basic requirements are met. Only when they feel that their legitimate grievances are not being addressed do they become

anti-social and resort to violence. The following quotation of Eric Fromm (in *Art of Loving*) as quoted by Joseph Wronka (2009) (9) is quite apt in this regard:

The more the drive towards life is thwarted the stronger is the drive towards destruction… Destructiveness is that outcome of unlived life.

Since their legitimate demands remain unfulfilled, we witness tension, conflict and anti state activities like burning buses or police stations or throwing grenades, laying mines and killing policemen, etc.

The reaction of the government has more often than not, been to suppress these elements that are involved in violent activities by brutal force. The use of brutal retaliatory action incites anger and frustration in the tribal population, rather than quell the violence indulged by them. By and large, there is lack of dialogue and little effort at understanding the root causes of the violence and how to address them so that the Maoists or other similar elements abjure violence and join the mainstream political life. The situation has become worse by the introduction of a para-military force (*Salwa Judum*) created by the government to terrorize the Maoists and their sympathizers.

Problems have further escalated after the last year's large scale killings of police personnel on 6th April and 17th May in the state of Chattisgarh. The state machinery has little interest in having any dialogue with these groups (presumably Maoist elements) after their cruel and lethal attacks. However it is important to continue efforts at having a dialogue and finding a mutually satisfactory solution to the vexed problem of violence and to restore peace in the region.

In a series of articles on how to win over the hearts and minds of the tribal population in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh where large scale violence was observed both by the state and against the police, the newspaper *The Hindu* has brought out some revealing facts. It has reported (22, 23 March 2011), that in March 2011, three Chhattisgarh villages were torched by the police, their homes and granaries were burnt, three women were sexually assaulted and villagers beaten and terrorized. The newspaper also reports how money meant for development purposes has been misused in purchasing unnecessary equipment or materials like weighing machines and ambulances when even the rudimentary medical facilities -- medicines or doctors, are not available in this region.

The principal way by which tribal violence and counter violence by the state can be addressed is by having an extensive and sympathetic dialogue with representatives of the tribal people to consider their demands and find out alternative methods of development. This is necessary to ensure that harmony that has existed between them and their environment is not disturbed and they are not forced out from their lands that they have occupied for centuries and are their homes.

In this regard, the decision of the Supreme Court of India (which has been playing a pro-active role) (*The Hindu*, March 30 2011) to dispatch two of its Commissioners and the District Collector of *Dantewada* to visit some villages and find out the conditions of the poor where food scarcity and hunger deaths have been reported, is a welcome first step.

Some possible strategies for meeting the legitimate demands of the tribal population and diffusing tension and conflict have been suggested in the article by Bhatia ((7), op.cit).

According to a well known civil society social organization *Ekta Parishad* as reported in *The Hindu:*

"The Naxal issue is not a developmental issue, but a rights issue. It is the denial of rights to the people, not the absence of roads".

It further points out that the government must address fundamental issues of land and people's control over their future rather than building infrastructure.

The violence is basically due to faulty policies of development and absence of or delay in provision of basic requirements. It is not a problem of terrorism that must be dealt with a heavy hand.

7. Violence and destruction caused by natural disasters

Natural disasters take different forms – floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes, hurricanes, tsunamis etc, causing untold misery and destruction to mankind, animals and agriculture. Countless number of people living near disaster prone areas like rivers, sea coasts or mountains have suffered death and destruction as a result of these natural occurrences. The word *tsunami* has entered the vocabulary as a result of devastation caused a few years back by huge tides or waves sometimes as high as 12 metres. The last tsunami that occurred in the north-east coast of Japan on 11th March 2011 has brought in its wake flooding, death and destruction of property and buildings. It has been caused by an earthquake measuring 8.9 on the Richter's scale (the highest recorded earthquake in Japan). The quake and the tsunami have struck in tandem in the Japanese coast near the city of Sendai unleashing devastation and death and sending warning signals in countries as far as Indonesia and the western coast of USA and South America. It has also resulted in extensive damage to some of their nuclear reactors and emission of lethal radioactivity in the environment.

Some people argue with some justification, that natural disasters are manifestation of nature's revenge on humans for damaging and destroying the environment by cutting mountains or by deforestation etc. It is a moot point to what extent the above argument is true. There is however little doubt that disturbing the nature by modern developmental activities that cut forest cover or engage in mining activities in some mountainous regions have led to adverse consequences like excessive or deficient rainfall, flooding, landslides and the like, that harm not only humanity and animals but also agriculture.

There are many people who do not believe in a distant God but find God in Nature – in mountains, trees, the sun, the night sky, etc. These people revere and care for Nature, and revel in its beauty and are filled with wonder at Nature's mysteries and power.

Albert Einstein, the famous scientist was overawed by Nature's beauty and workings and proclaimed that in that sense he was a deeply religious person. Another well known science writer Carl Sagan has this to say about Nature:

A religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths

Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian leader has confessed:

I believe in the cosmos. All of us are linked to the cosmos. So nature is my god. To me, nature is sacred. Trees are my temples and forests are my cathedrals.

There is a Hindu tradition and practice called *Surya namaskaar* or saluting the Sun God and paying obeisance to it. Other religious groups also treat Nature as God. Reference has already been made to the tribal people *Dongria Konds* in the state of Orissa who worship the nearby hills as living deities.

8. Gandhi's concept of truth and non-violence

We know that people all over the world despite the numerous diversities of religion, language, culture and race, desire to live in peace and harmony in their everyday lives. However, they need basic requirements of a decent humane life – food, shelter, education, employment, freedom to practice their religion and culture. Most religions have established programmes for the welfare of their followers including providing food, shelter and education. For details of the charitable institutional practices of providing food and succor by prominent religions in India refer to the article by the undersigned (Ravi P Bhatia (2009), (10).

How would Gandhian principles of truth peace, amity, religious tolerance that have become part of our heritage help in addressing the problems of the poor and the vulnerable sections of our population and promote their welfare and peace? How would these principles help to reduce conflict and violence?

Gandhi felt that economic and spiritual *swaraj* **(**self governance**)** – not just India's political freedom from the British, would reduce violence for a great majority of people. A just and equitable economic system with individuals having the freedom of working honestly in their local communities would constitute the essentials of economic *swaraj*. This would ensure equal opportunities for all – including the very poor.

Spiritual *swaraj*, on the other hand signified morality, truth and discipline.

By spiritual *swaraj*, according to Anthony Parel (11), Gandhi meant the inner discipline of a citizen that was marked by purity of intention and control over base tendencies like dishonesty,

greed, aggression and violence. This entailed practice of several moral values and virtues like truth, non-violence, detachment, manual labour, prayer, compassion and a deep spiritual life.

The Gandhian concept of *swara*j – both economic and spiritual, places responsibilities and duties on all stake holders – the modern state, the civil society and the individual. The state is required to treat all sections of its people with justice and without discrimination --- or in other words fulfill the basic needs and requirements for a healthy, meaningful and dignified existence for all citizens. It also places a responsibility on a community to limits its wants and not to exploit physical and natural resources beyond a reasonable limit and not to indulge in violence against other communities or individuals. Individuals also have to temper their needs to protect the environment and to live with other individuals with amity and co-operation. It also requires them to cultivate the concept of non-violence and non-killing in thought, belief and action.

These are aspects that come out unambiguously from what Gandhi wrote and the manner he lived -- advocating a simple, moral, truthful, non-violent life for the state and the individual.

Gandhi was an embodiment of spirituality, truth and non-violence. His role in propagating non-violent means and the use of *Satyagraha* (truthful and passive resistance) in his struggle against the might of the British Empire is well known. When he was leading an agitation and a certain situation arose where people resorted to violence, he would withdraw the agitation or go on a fast in order to stop the violence that seemed to be engulfing the situation.

Fasting for Gandhi was a very effective and non-violent means of seeking justice. He went on public fasts against the British when he felt that normal means of dialogue and persuasion had failed against policies which he considered were detrimental to the Indian people. He also went on fasts to stop large scale violence of one community against another during the British rule. History informs us that he was largely successful in his objectives. This practice has been successfully adopted by some prominent leaders of India to highlight and address the problems resulting from faulty governance or wrong policies.

However Gandhi imposed strict conditions for going on a fast. According to Bhikhu Parekh (12): *It must have a concrete and clearly specified purpose…it should not in any way be designed to serve one's own interests… and finally it should only be undertaken by one who is an acknowledged moral leader of his people*

How to achieve non-violence? According to Gandhi, all humans have a body and an *atman* (soul). The former is subject to many desires and passions like ego, greed, lust, envy, attachment etc. When any of these desires is not fulfilled and it is not possible for human beings to have complete feeling of fulfillment, it leads to unhappiness, resentment and ultimately to violence against society, another individual or even oneself. Thus we see violence all around us.

Gandhi felt that only an *atman* can be free from desires and passions and thus become free from becoming violent. The *atman* is a source and embodiment of virtues like love, harmony and compassion among other qualities. But as soon as it takes on a body, it becomes subject to passions and violence. He wrote "Just as violence is the law of the jungle, ahimsa is the law of

humanity. The spiritual mind is dormant in animals. The dignity of man comes from higher spirituality" (Gandhi (13).

He also insisted on right means and ahimsa for all his actions. For him non-violence was the cornerstone of truth. "Truth is its own proof and non-violence is its supreme fruit" (14). Refraining from violence or killings is not an easy task or passive concept. It requires maturity, courage and a high degree of morality.

According to *John Kavanagh* (15) (2002, p. 123, the principle of NK is not a recommendation for passivity, since 'commitment to the inherent dignity of personal life requires us to intervene on behalf of the defenceless or the victim'. Glen Paige (16) adds that non killing is not only rejection of killing, but also implies constructive engagement in societal transformation'.

Other religious leaders in history – Asoka, Christ, Mahavira (whose followers are called *Jains* believe in NV against all forms of life), Mohammed, Guru Nanak Dev (founder of Sikhism), Swami Vivekananda, had all practiced and preached peace, non-violence and non-killings. Marvin Harris (17, 1990, p. 438) writes that perhaps the oldest recorded religion, Zoroastrianism also preached non-killing. These religions could all be described as non-killing religions in theory although in practice many religions have fought religious and other wars.

Gandhian methods of non-violence have influenced many leaders like Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu Nelson Mandela and others in their struggles against injustice and discrimination in their own countries. Echoing Gandhi, Martin Luther King had famously said "Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal."

Despite being a man of peace, Gandhi was not just an idealist but also a pragmatist and could see the need for taking up arms for defensive purposes. If a country was under attack, it was the duty of the state to defend against the attack by all possible means. In this context he stated:

> *I think that a nation that has no control over one's own defence forces and over her external policy is hardly a responsible nation. Defence, its army is to a nation the very essence of its existence. (Gandhi (18), p. 304).*

In the same vein Gandhi also wrote

> *I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour* (Gandhi, (19), 1920a, p.3).

In the contemporary world with its complexities and diversity, strategies other than the Gandhian approach have to be used against dictatorial and violence-prone regimes. The well-known pacifist and scholar Gene Sharp ((20), 2003) has suggested various types of non-violent strategies to combat injustice and repression by these regimes. However the use of violence continues unabated – in fact with the use of modern technology, its nature has changed; at the same time, it has become more brutal and lethal. Whether it is Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan or India, violence in these regions has become endemic. The causes of violence and the justification given by states in inflicting violence are diverse but the frequent and widespread use of violence and the ensuing death and destruction is undeniable.

While discussing the role of violence and passive resistance in the *Hind Swaraj* (Chapter XVII p. 69), Gandhi (21) wrote:

> "Passive Resistance (soul-force) is a method of securing rights by personal suffering: it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance the government of the day has passed a law, which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If, by using violence I force the government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self."

Gandhi also added in the same chapter in *Hind Swaraj* (22), that despite there being so much violence and killings "the fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love."

In the conclusion of *Hind Swaraj* (p. 89) Gandhi (23) reinforces the idea of non-killing in the following words:

> "Like others, he *(a moral person)* will know that no nation has risen without suffering, that even in warfare, the true test is suffering and not killing others, much more so in the warfare of passive resistance."

Referring to passive violence Gandhi, (as outlined in Section 3.3 above), was convinced that we are all subject to it and this leads to much of the violence that is visible in society. The main factors behind violence according to Gandhi's grandson Arun Gandhi, are the so-called "Seven Blunders".

Gandhi's seven blunders: *Wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humanity; worship without sacrifice; politics without principles.*

Looking at the spurt of violence in different regions of the country today, what would have been a Gandhian approach to mitigate the problems behind the violence that we see around us today? Talking of Jammu & Kashmir's violence, would Gandhi have approved or at least accepted the pelting of stones and the accompanying violence to highlight the problems faced in the Kashmir valley? The Gandhian approach would have been to mobilise people and demonstrate non-violently against the state assembly or other state institutions, or to have *hartals* (strikes) or boycott classes or not pay taxes etc. But this would have been a long and tortuous path, which in the present day or age, most parties or communities are reluctant to adopt. They want quick results.

Violence generated by the extremists or the youth brings into focus the urgency of the problem. Some action has already been taken after the recent violence in the Kashmir valley although what would be the outcome of the steps initiated by the central or state governments cannot be foreseen. Similarly the violence witnessed in the Maoist/tribal regions has given urgency to the situation. A long and tortuous path lies ahead of us to restore trust and peace.

9. Gandhi's Concept of Education

Violence is endemic in contemporary times both at the levels of family and society as well as at the state and international levels. Systematic violence is the means adopted by societies and all oppressive regimes in various countries**.** Political classes can promote peace only to the extent that that the masses are non-violent. And the latter can become non-violent only if structures of violence existing in a state are removed. These structures consist of socio-political inequalities, caste, class, racial, religious disparities, gender discrimination, and the urban and rural divide, to name some principal causes. Unless these structures are done away with, there is little likelihood of a peaceful, non-violent society.

Most governments and scholars now agree that education is a desirable objective in itself and is also the means for inculcating right attitudes and morality among people. It is also essential for the material development of society by reducing poverty and want. It helps to empower people especially the downtrodden ones. Countries with high achievement levels in the field of education also have high indices in other areas like food availability, health, longevity, and general welfare. It contributes to reducing infant mortality rates and curbing population growth.

We also know that education helps us in understanding developmental issues and transformation of society into a more just, peaceful, and equitable one. It also helps us in understanding and analysing concepts of violence and peace. It may be pointed out that peace is not just the absence of violence but also indicates absence of conflictual situations.
Can education help us to avoid or reduce conflict and promote peace? It is an uphill task, but not an impossible one to redesign educational objectives to highlight the evils of violence and offer non-violent means to avoid conflict and violence. Before delineating this aspect, let us briefly recapitulate some principal objectives of education. According to scholars, some principal ones are:

- empowerment of people and society
- all round development of the child – including skills, knowledge, values, learning how to learn, and so forth
- development of social norms of living in harmony with mankind and nature
- development of the society – including production, creating wealth and improving the well being of people, reducing social, economic, educational, and other inequities;
- providing jobs to people both in urban and rural areas;
- creating and developing new knowledge and technology and overcoming ignorance and prejudice; and
- answering philosophical questions such as the place of man in the world, the future of mankind, the role of religion, and understanding what peace is.

It is now well known that a proper and relevant educational system helps to foster awareness of the society – both human and the environment, which leads us to cultivate a healthy value system of living together in harmony and treating others with respect and dignity. It also helps to develop a proper attitude including the right to life of others and non-killing of infants or of rejecting committing foeticide.

We also accept the fact that education is essential for all round development of human beings and society as well as helping in upward mobility of sections of society. It also is necessary in

providing necessary skills so that people are able to get jobs in this competitive world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (24) in Article 26 clearly outlines the role and benefits of education for the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of human rights and freedom.

More than 80 years ago, Gandhi propagated simple and far-reaching objectives in his concept of *Nai Taleem* (New Education). He felt that a proper education system would help in creating right attitudes of love, truth and non-violence. He spoke of education for both boys and girls, for urban and rural children. His concept of education stressed the integration of 'the world of knowledge' with 'the world of work,' a concept we are familiar with in today's language as vocational and relevant education for all. He felt that this was essential for the poor of India who would not only get some basic knowledge but also acquire useful skills to be utilised throughout life. These skills in Gandhi's time included weaving, pottery, stitching, and the like, but in today's time would also include repair of radios and electronic devices, maintenance of tractors, cars, bicycles, and tube wells, first aid, nursing, computer and entrepreneur skills and the like. Some of these would be more relevant for men and others for women.

The fundamental premise of the *Nai Taleem* was that it would teach simple skills to the people and help them remain in villages as useful citizens and not be forced to leave for towns and cities looking for unskilled, poorly paid, and degrading jobs and be exposed to urban violence of one form or another. What was true in Gandhi's time is still relevant in today's world where we see highly formally educated people without jobs and villagers under the impact of urbanization and globalization migrating to cities in search of any odd job such as *rickshaw puller* or rag picker.

Violence against women, female infanticide or mistreatment of the girl child would definitely be reduced if our education system followed Gandhi’s principles of moral values, equality, non-violence, truth and cultivation of right attitudes.

A right type of education would make people more self-reliant, bridge socio-economic disparities and the rural-urban divide, and generally help in the society becoming more egalitarian, harmonious, and contented. In an article in *The Hindu* (20 January, 2011) Professor Krishna Kumar, the former Director of NCERT has argued that “The teaching of reading during early childhood – when attitudes, habits and skills acquire life-long foundations – assumes crucial significance for the efficient functioning of democracy”. These aspects would help in the creation of a just social order where there is a reduction of conflict and violence caused by socio-economic and other disparities.

For Gandhi, education was not only a formal learning of language or basic arithmetic or history or geography of a country. It was based on the concept of relevance. In what way is the education being imparted to the children especially in rural areas, relevant to their needs and physical, mental and moral development? Gandhi emphasized education not only for boys but also for girls, For Gandhi, universal and relevant education was the essential spiritual building block of man and his actions. Gandhi combined his concept of basic education with political action and right means.

Gandhi’s emphasis was on simple living and limiting one’s wants, and avoiding excessive consumerism that is present today in most societies. This has the positive effect of proper

utilization of material resources and leading to protection of the environment and sustainable development.

These thoughts and practices of simple living, belief in non-violence and truth and amity between different religious groups combined with right and just policies, would help in reducing injustices, disparities, and terrorism in today's complex world.

10. Conclusions

This essay has highlighted different types of conflict, violence and killings present in contemporary society. We have divided the various types of violence and killings witnessed into various categories to facilitate understanding of the principal causes behind this discord and violence. The issue of Maoist/Naxal violence has been considered at length and some broad strategies for addressing and reducing it have been indicated.

We have also briefly outlined Gandhi's principles of truth, justice, non-violence and amity between different groups of people and religions. Gandhi propagated a system of brotherhood of all human beings and tolerance for different religious faiths. This would help in reduction of religious discord and suspicion. We have argued that application of Gandhi's principles would help in amelioration of the situation where injustice and discrimination prevail. These principles would promote fulfillment of basic requirements of the needy and yield conditions of peace, amity and reduce violence and killings.

Gandhi always worked for the welfare of all people including the very poor that would lead to non-discrimination and justice for all. He also adopted an effective, non-violent technique of fasting for seeking justice or whenever there was large scale violence in society.

We have also discussed the role of education in promoting peace and welfare of people and how Gandhi's concept of education would lead to wholesome and sustainable development of society and protection of the environment. Gandhi's emphasis on simple and unostentatious living would be beneficial for the environment as well as for humankind and animal life.

It is not being suggested that Gandhi's principles alone are important and sufficient. Just policies and a proper governance system are also necessary. But any just system of governance in the contemporary world would benefit from the different concepts that Gandhi advocated and embodied in his life – concepts of truth, justice, equality, simple and unostentatious living, tolerance for all religions, non-discrimination, proper education, non-violence and peace.

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